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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESENTS EXBS PROGRAM EQUIPMENT TO GVN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador highlighted the GVN's support for our EXBS Program cooperation in a ceremony March 1 to hand over new equipment to increase the effectiveness of customs officers. The GVN officials praised EXBS Program assistance, noting that it helps them meet key training priorities and supplements their inadequate equipment. The handover ceremony received prominent national press coverage. End Summary.

EXBS Program Addresses GVN Priorities

¶2. (SBU) During a March 1 ceremony, the Ambassador presented Export Control and Border Security (EXBS) Program-funded equipment to high-level officials of the General Department of Customs ("Customs") and the Border Guard Command. Prior to the presentation ceremony at Customs headquarters, the Ambassador met with Customs Department Director General Le Manh Hung to underscore the importance of our cooperation in the area of export control as a means of countering the spread of WMD. He also recognized the excellent cooperation of the GVN, and the Department of Customs in particular, in implementing EXBS Program activities during the past year and reviewed some upcoming training during the next six months.

¶3. (SBU) Director General Hung responded that security and facilitation of trade are GVN priorities for which Customs is responsible. Customs has focused on training to increase the Department's capabilities and EXBS Program workshops are particularly valuable in this respect. Most of the equipment used by Customs officers is "primitive," so the EXBS equipment being provided is also very valuable. The DG expressed confidence that, "in the shortest time," the EXBS program-provided equipment would be effectively used in the hands of frontline customs officers.

EXBS Assistance Helps to Reform Customs Department

¶4. (SBU) Following the meeting, the Ambassador and DG Hung joined Colonel Bui Song Nham, Deputy Chief of Staff of the MOD Border Guard Command, for the presentation of the EXBS-funded equipment, valued at USD 91,000, consisting of radiation pagers and various inspection tools. On behalf of the USG, the Ambassador highlighted our excellent cooperation through the EXBS Program in the fight against the proliferation of WMD. He also noted that the equipment, in conjunction with EXBS-provided training, would assist Customs and the Border Guard to be more effective in this fight. DG Hung expressed appreciation for USG cooperation and technical assistance, "as evidenced most immediately by the equipment being presented." The active role of the United States helps Customs "push up our reform and modernization process, ensuring security and anti-terrorism efforts support the stable international integration of Vietnam," the DG said. Colonel Nham also expressed appreciation for U.S. assistance to the Border Guard, noting that our bilateral partnership in the area of border security contributes greatly to the implementation of "the determination of our two countries in the fight against terrorism..."

¶5. (U) In response to a press advisory issued by the Embassy Public

Affairs Section, about one dozen journalists showed up to cover the event. The ceremony was widely covered in major national newspapers and internet news outlets the following day.

MARINE